



Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee
Meeting Minutes

January 31, 2008, 8:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.
Superintendent's Conference Room (3-SE36)

Abelardo Saavedra, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools

The purpose of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee (PEC) is to support public-engagement outreach for the district's efforts in providing high-quality education, communicate critically important information, and gain valuable input from key community members.

IN ATTENDANCE

Reginald Adams
Richard Ballanfant
Rev. Leonard Barksdale
Ann Blackwood
Bill Calhoun
Martin Cominsky
Al Crampton
Dale Davidson
Elliott Gershenson

Mary Scott Hagle
Arva Howard
Elsie Huang
Joyce Jacquet
Howard Jefferson
Judy Long
Linda Mercer
Sandie Meyers
Laura Richardson

Francisco Rodríguez
Donna Shanklin Henderson
Bessie Swindle
Melva Thornton
Lillian Villarreal
Maggie Utter Solomon
Janice Walker

INTRODUCTION

HISD Superintendent of Schools Abelardo Saavedra welcomed the members of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee. Dr. Saavedra introduced Board of Education President Harvin Moore. Mr. Moore also welcomed the committee and relayed brief remarks from fellow trustee Greg Meyers. Other board members who joined the meeting were Paula Harris, Larry Marshall, and Manuel Rodríguez.

Dr. Saavedra stated that the purpose is to engage the community through the committee. He said that two-thirds of the PEC members were nominated to serve on the committee through their respective board member. The superintendent invited other community individuals to serve on the committee.

Dr. Saavedra asked the committee members to introduce themselves, specify their roles in the community, and tell which board member nominated them. He then introduced the district's chief administrators as follows: Dr. Michele Pola (chief of staff), Dr. Karen Soehnge (chief academic officer), Melinda Garrett (chief financial officer), and Dick Lindsay (chief business operations officer).

DISCUSSION

A packet of information was distributed to each committee member. Dr. Saavedra reviewed the material in the folder, which included the following information: HISD organization chart (direct reports to the superintendent-level offices only), administrative directory, regional district map, board trustee district map, list of schools by trustee district, *Beliefs and Visions, Moving Ahead!* (student achievement), *2008 HISD Facts and Figures*, and an ASPIRE (Accelerating Student Progress. Increasing Results & Expectations) guide to value-added progress.

Dr. Saavedra stated that at the next PEC meeting, the committee will be asked to draw straws to determine if members will serve two- or three-year terms. Having members serve a term of more than one year will help provide continuity on the committee.

Dr. Saavedra stated that on the basis of a survey completed by the members, the committee had identified *Improve Public Support and Confidence in Schools* and *Student Achievement* as priority areas for discussion. The committee provided the following input on the two subjects:

Public Support and Confidence in Schools

- ✓ Need more confidence in my neighborhood school
 - Do not know students
 - Scores not good
- ✓ Closely tied to student achievement
- ✓ More marketing of the good
- ✓ Go back to basics
- ✓ Get more parents involved in secondary schools
- ✓ Have meetings where more parents/community members can attend

Student Achievement

- ✓ More customer-service emphasis in HISD—mind shift
- ✓ Parents need to feel welcomed
 - Made it difficult for parents
 - Individual schools create barriers
- ✓ HISD Customer Service (1 to 10, with 10 highest)
 - Central level (overall)—4- to 5
- ✓ No liaison/procedures/parameters for parental involvement
- ✓ Some employees in HISD “nasty,” rude
- ✓ Empower parents—train them—how to become involved—even specific to level—i.e., middle-school parental involvement
- ✓ Parent strategies/tips—training to engage ministers throughout city with the training
- ✓ Re-introduce HISD to customers/community
 - 1) Introduce
 - 2) Offer
 - 3) Value
 - 4) Benefit
 - 5) Close
 - Confidence comes from knowledge
 - Employ strategies at school level
- ✓ Maximize networks of community groups
 - Reach out to diverse communities—retirees
- ✓ Some schools market well—not clear how to interact with district/region beyond school level
- ✓ Schools often do not follow through with offers of assistance
- ✓ Some schools welcome parents
 - Starts with SDMC at campus level (its effectiveness)
 - Lots of differences on effectiveness of SDMC
 - This is a vehicle that would be helpful
- ✓ Character Education is needed in all schools—in parent education
- ✓ Teachers—feeling job insecurity, fear powerlessness in dealing with student issues
 - Confidence must come from strong teachers
- ✓ Confidence comes from quality
 - Know your customers, know their needs, meet their needs, sell your product

Dr. Saavedra requested committee members to respond to the following question: What role should regional offices play in developing community relationships and partnerships?

CONCLUSION

Dr. Saavedra thanked the members for their interest and participation on the committee. He asked the committee to complete a questionnaire at the end of the meeting. The form included the following questions:

- What did you find beneficial about today's meeting?
- What would have improved the meeting?
- What questions do you still have?

The responses will be shared with the committee and used to plan the next meeting.

RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION

Senior staff under the leadership of Dr. Michele Pola are using the information to develop specific action plans to address customer-service and community-communication systems. An update on progress will be provided at the next meeting.

**The next meeting of the Superintendent's Public Education Committee
will be held on Wednesday, April 23, 2008, at 8:30 a.m.**

**Dr. Michele Pola, chief of staff, will serve as the liaison to the committee.
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